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Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty

ABDEL RAZZAQ TAKRITI

In March 1955, a month after the launch of the Baghdad Pact, Gamal Abdel Nasser reflected on the problem of freedom in Africa and Asia in general, and in the Arab world in particular. He noted the ascendance of "a liberationist spirit, or a spirit of liberation," which was "present among the people" even "if it was absent in the case of some governments." That spirit, in which popular sovereignty resided, sharply contrasted with the realities of enduring colonialism and emerging neocolonialism. Most of the Arab countries were still colonized, and those that were nominally independent were under immense pressure to enter Cold War defense and economic agreements that would undermine their ability to determine their futures:

> They are concerned with defense, and we care about our freedom. We were colonized, our lands were occupied, and our development was left to improvisation so as to weaken the people. Today, all we want is to create an independent, strong personality that is not subordinate, free to direct its internal policy as it wishes and to pursue its external relationships in accordance with its interests.

Given the transnational interconnectedness of the colonial and neocolonial systems, the battle for independence had to be carried out beyond national boundaries: "we are fighting in the Arab sphere, in the African sphere, and in these areas as a whole." The fight was not restricted to foreign powers: "we are also fighting the agents of colonialism. So long as there are agents of imperialism deriving their own influence from foreign influence, we will be confronted with a major force that we must resist."[1]

The threat that local rulers posed to genuine independence was elaborated upon further in 1957 by Muhammad Hassanein Haikal, Nasser's confidant and the most famous

This essay benefited from Ussama Makdisi's scholarly generosity and extensive input, Karma Nabulsi's intellectual stimulation and unwavering engagement, Sudhir Hazareesingh's incisive commentary, and Laila Parsons's meticulously judicious suggestions. All of them read multiple drafts with patience and care. I am also grateful to Nimer Sultany and Hicham Safieddine for sharing useful thoughts and resources, and to Jane Lyle for the best copyediting I have ever experienced. Last but not least, I owe much to Alex Lichtenstein and the *AHR* blind peer reviewers for providing constructive criticisms and helpful recommendations that immeasurably improved the article.

[1] Gamal Abdel Nasser, "Muhadarat al-Raʾis Gamal Abdel Nasser fi Mabna al-Kuliyya al-Harbiyya al-Qadim," March 28, 1955, President Gamal Abdel Nasser (Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Gamal Abdel Nasser Foundation), http://www.nasser.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=327&lang=ar. All Arabic translations provided in this article are mine unless otherwise noted. I would like to thank Sana Tannoury-Karam and Patrick Higgins for standardizing the transliteration.

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Arab journalist of the twentieth century. In his view, there was a global imperial quest to entrench in power "rulers without peoples, and leaders without armies." The gist of Western policy in the Arab world, as in South and East Asia, was to circumvent popular sovereignty by installing monarchs and presidents who were committed to maintaining political and economic alignment with the Western metropoles: "Chiang Kai-shek by another name . . . Bhumibol by another name . . . Suhrawardy by another name."[2] Coups d'état afforded a convenient avenue for achieving that goal.

Compared to its more popular cousin, revolution, the coup d'état has received limited theoretical attention. This does not mean that it has been entirely neglected. Aristotle discussed ancient oligarchic coups and democratic counter-coups with reference to changes in the military balance of power among competing social constituencies.[3] Ibn Khaldun analyzed coups in medieval Islamic lands in terms of the decay of solidarity networks out of which dynasties originally emerged.[4] Modern political theory has generally assessed coups either as mere power contests among a ruling clique or as resulting from structurally determined social conflicts. The first approach is seen in the work of liberal thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, who insisted that "power changes hands from one man to another, from one clique to another," and this alteration "is circumscribed to the sphere of government and carries a minimum of unquiet to the people at large."[5] The second orientation is reflected in the writings of historical materialists like Karl Marx, who addressed coups as processes underlain by a complex series of shifting class struggles and alliances.[6]

In the literature on twentieth-century coups, most works treat the phenomenon as essentially postcolonial, taking place after independence as a consequence of actions by African, Asian, and Latin American military actors.[7] The motives of army officers are

[2] Muhammad Hassanein Haikal, "Siyasat ʿAzl Misr ʿan al-Mantiqa wa-Ittijahatuha," *Akhir Saʿa*, May 21, 1957.

[3] For a critical discussion of theories of coups in ancient Greece, with a special focus on Aristotle, see Hans van Wees, "Tyrants, Oligarchs and Citizen Militias," in Angelos Chaniotis and Pierre Ducrey, eds., *Army and Power in the Ancient World* (Stuttgart, 2002), 61–82, here 77–81.

[4] The first stage in Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of governance entails the seizure of rule by a new dynasty whose internal bonds of solidarity have enabled it to overcome the previous dynasty. In the second stage, the ruler seeks to assert his full dominance and to reduce his reliance on relatives. To do so, he relies on functionaries from outside his original solidarity circle. This alienates sections of his dynasty and leads them to conspire toward his overthrow. See "Fi Istizhar Sahib al-Dawlah ʿala Qawmihi wa-Ahli ʿAsabiyyatihi bi-l-Mawali wa-l-Mustaniʿin," chapter 19 in Abdul Rahman and Abdel Salam al-Shadadi, eds., *Al-Muqaddima* (Casablanca, 2005), here 312–313.

[5] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963; repr., London, 2006), 25.

[6] This is especially evident in Marx's analysis of the coup d'état carried out in 1851 by Louis Bonaparte in France. He presents the event as the culmination of dynamics that initially pitted the proletariat against the allied forces of "the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeois, the army, the lumpen proletariat organized as the Mobile Guard, the intellectual lights, the clergy, and the rural population," and later divided these anti-proletarian social forces against each other, eventually resulting in the rise of an executive authority that ruled over them all with the backing of the smallholding peasantry. See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf, 8.

[7] Some of these works have situated coups as resulting from political instability generated in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. See, for example, A. B. Assensoh and Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, *African Military History and Politics: Coups and Ideological Incursions, 1900–Present* (New York, 2001). Other scholars have approached coups from a class perspective, focusing on the inter-class antagonisms reflected in the "subalternization" of coups. See in particular Jimmy Kandeh, *Coups from Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa* (New York, 2004). Unsurprisingly, much of the literature is dedicated to the study of institutional dynamics within the military and their intersection with political movements and currents. Consult, for instance, Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism* (London, 2011).

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microanalyzed, and the necessary steps required for a coup are pondered.[8] Coups are "seen to occur when the military, or a section of the military, turns its coercive power against the apex of the State, establishes itself there, and the rest of the State takes its orders from the new regime."[9] This common view is rooted in a social scientific framework that approaches coups through the prism of democratization theory. The majority of writings focus on coups as anti-democratic episodes, although some recent works have considered instances of "democratic coups."[10]

Such approaches do not account for numerous coups that took place in the second half of the twentieth century under completely different circumstances, driven by factors other than rapacity in the pursuit of power and resources on the part of caricaturized Third World military leaders. Far from being devoid of norms or lacking in representation of collective interests, many coups can be better understood in terms of their relationship to colonialism and global contestations over political and economic sovereignty. As the great European empires were retreating from their colonies, and as the two Cold War blocs were struggling over the alignment of newly independent or semi-independent countries, the question of who was to hold terminal political authority, own natural resources, and control geopolitical space became increasingly significant. Coups played an underappreciated historical role in resolving this question, affording us an additional angle for studying the process of transition from colonial rule to postcolonial state formation and governance.

Scholars have discussed this transition as a post–Second World War quest by the British to move "from an empire of rule to an empire of influence."[11] On the Arab side of the Gulf, this meant instituting a variety of decolonization whereby sheikhdoms would be transformed from protected entities whose foreign affairs and defense were under official imperial control into independent states closely linked to the United Kingdom and the rest of the Western bloc. Yet there is much left to be said about the degree to which this process necessitated years of coercive intervention in existing native structures, so as to secure both the stability of their alignment with Britain and the West and their capacity to survive against anticolonial challengers opposed to this alignment. How did British authorities shepherd client structures from the old colonial era into the new age of independence, all the while ensuring a "postcolonial" future that would be dominated by a pliant ruling elite?

Alongside the pursuit of counterinsurgency, empires depended at the height of the Cold War on leadership change to either tackle or preempt existing and potential anticolonial challenges. The novelty of that politics lay in the fact that for the first time in history, imperialism could not be proudly announced, which meant that covert interven-

[8] The parameters of the discussion in the field of political science were established in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a period that witnessed numerous military coups. Two well-known examples focusing on the military are Donald L. Horowitz, *Coup Theories and Officers' Motives: Sri Lanka in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, N.J., 1980); and Robin Luckham, *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt, 1960–67* (Cambridge, 1971). An early account of the strategy, planning, and execution of coups is provided by U.S. defense consultant Edward N. Luttwak in his *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook* (London, 1968).

[9] Charles Sampford, "Coups d'etat and Law," *Bulletin of the Australian Society of Legal Philosophy* 13, no. 51 (1989): 253–286, here 257.

[10] Ozan O. Varol, "The Democratic Coup d'état," *Harvard International Law Journal* 53, no. 2 (2012): 291–356.

[11] John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009), 611.

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tions were preferred to overt entanglements. The struggle to retain, or even expand, influence over other countries continued, but it had to be done in more subtle ways. Thus the high age of anticolonialism was not just a time of liberation struggles and colonial wars; it also saw a proliferation of coups on a global scale.

These coups were not all alike, and we can delineate, for the sake of historical specificity, three major kinds: neocolonial, anticolonial, and colonial. We now know a substantial amount about several high-profile coups that were neocolonial in character, carried out against governments—such as those of Muhammad Mossadegh in Iran, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, and Salvador Allende in Chile—that were contesting foreign political and economic hegemony within formally independent states.[12] Likewise, there is a literature on anticolonial coups that took place in countries that had achieved nominal independence but were still revolving in the colonial orbit. These coups were launched by patriotic forces, often emanating from the army officer class, who were opposed to foreign control and the local structures tied to it. In the Arab context, such coups took on a republican character, overthrowing monarchical regimes that were allied with British imperialism. They also entailed mobilizing broader society toward achieving genuine long-term political and economic independence. Paradigmatic examples include Egypt in 1952 and Iraq in 1958.[13] Crucially, these anticolonial coups resulted in a reorientation of foreign policy, bringing about what has been described as an Arab "revolutionary wave" in the 1950s that extended well into the 1960s.[14] In the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, the reverberations of that wave were most intensely felt in the 1958 Free Princes Movement in Saudi Arabia; the coup in Yemen on September 26, 1962; the revolution in Aden and the Protectorates that began on October 14, 1963; and the Dhufar revolution in Oman, which was launched on June 9, 1965.

It was against the backdrop of this revolutionary wave that the phenomenon of anchoring suitable allies in power by means of colonial coups grew in importance. Colonial coups took place in locales in which rule was formally divided between the local

[12] See, for example, Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York, 2013); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952–1954*, 2nd ed. (Palo Alto, Calif., 2006); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, N.J., 1992); Jonathan Haslam, *The Nixon Administration and the Death of Allende's Chile: A Case of Assisted Suicide* (London, 2005); and Lubna Z. Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (Lanham, Md., 2009). Beyond these individual studies, there has been a historiographical effort to examine the broader implications of these coups. An important regional literature, particularly concerned with the Cold War in Latin America, already provides us with a wealth of evidence that is useful for such an endeavor. See in particular Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, 2004), especially the concluding chapter, "Children of Abel: The Cold War as Revolution and Counterrevolution"; and Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011), 4–5.

[13] See Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Cambridge, 1992); and Hannah Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, N.J., 1978). Today these processes are increasingly approached from the standpoint of military rule or democratization, teleologically seen as harbingers of authoritarianism. Yet this ignores that what was primarily being contested at the time of the launch of these coups was not democracy; in their own age, they were seen as unleashing revolutionary mobilizations that asserted popular sovereignty, political and economic independence, and the pursuit of social transformation.

[14] For a recent theoretical reflection on revolutionary waves, see Colin J. Beck, "The World-Cultural Origins of Revolutionary Waves: Five Centuries of European Contention," *Social Science History* 35, no. 2 (2011): 167–207. For a broad, if sometimes empirically problematic, utilization of the concept in modern Middle East history, see Mark N. Katz, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Waves* (New York, 1999).

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FIGURE 1: Contemporary map of the United Arab Emirates. From U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/.

ruler and the imperial power.[15] They were incidents in which divided rule was temporarily suspended during a brief moment of forced abdication, only to be restored at the moment of ascendance of the imperially favored successor. These coups took place not only in the Arab *Mashriq*, but also in other parts of the British Empire, including Buganda, as well as in French-dominated countries like Morocco. In the Gulf, they were instruments for limiting the spread of radical political and economic alternatives, and they unfolded in a wave of power transference that engulfed Sharjah (1965), Abu Dhabi (1966), and, a few years later, Oman (1970). The Omani colonial coup has been extensively discussed, but the first two merit additional attention.[16]

[15] For a discussion of "divided rule," see Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley, Calif., 2013). Critiquing "indirect rule" as a framework for understanding the system established in Tunisia and other colonial territories, Lewis suggests instead that the establishment of colonialism be viewed in terms of complicated, and constantly renegotiated, sovereignty arrangements that resulted in the emergence of systems of "divided rule."

[16] For a personal account of the Oman coup by the Irish officer who commanded the assault on the palace of the Sultan, see Ray Kane, *Coup d'état Oman: The True Story of How British Officers Shot the Father, Elevated the Son and Saved the Country* (Kindle Edition, 2015), chap. 14, n.p. For the decision-making behind the coup, see Abdel Razzaq Takriti, "The 1970 Coup in Oman Reconsidered," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 155–173; and Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965–1976*, revised paperback ed. (Oxford, 2016), chap. 7.

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To study colonial coups is to reflect on the tension, in some cases unsustainable, between empire and ruler. In an era when local military forces were under effective metropolitan control or influence, the empire had the option to resolve this tension by forcibly carrying out the removal of a ruler, using units led by its own officers. In Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, these units came from the British-controlled Trucial Oman Scouts; in Oman, they were recruited out of the British-led Sultan's Armed Forces. In contrast, and under conditions of nominal sovereignty, coups affecting formally independent states—like those witnessed in Tehran in 1953 and Santiago in 1973—were launched by imperial diplomatic and intelligence services in coordination with local armies, security agencies, political figures, and social forces. This is a fundamental difference between these neocolonial coups and the colonial coups in the Gulf. They all had major implications for the nature and policies of the states they targeted, but they involved different levels of popular engagement. Neocolonial coups played out in public spaces: streets, squares, and—in cases like Chile—even the open skies. Colonial coups in the Gulf, on the other hand, always took place behind the walls of palaces and political residences. Unsurprisingly, neocolonial coups often left a deeper popular resonance, not least because they required, or unleashed, social mobilization, pitting an imperial alliance with conservative figures and networks against leaders representing nationalist or socialist movements.

Neocolonial coups tended to produce aggrieved *social* constituencies, whereas colonial coups in the Gulf region chiefly caused grievances among a limited section of the ruling dynasty.[17] There was far more at stake in both kinds of coups than petty internal squabbles of the sort described by Arendt, affecting as they did the long-term political, social, and economic orientation of the states in which they unfolded. Nevertheless, the absence of social mobilization in the case of colonial coups in the Gulf is noteworthy. This absence has historiographic implications, for deeper social memories tend to be translated into greater scholarly reflection. Historians of Iran or of Chile can hardly ignore the coups that took place in those countries. The opposite is true in the case of Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, and Oman. In those states the coups achieved such total victory that they were accompanied by an entire knowledge apparatus obfuscating their nature.

Over the past few decades, British authorities and Gulf states alike have carefully crafted and propagated an official narrative that misrepresents colonial coups as resulting from domestic power struggles within dynasties. Given the positionality of many of the texts that have defined Gulf studies, it is unsurprising that they neglect to focus on the intersection between British withdrawal and the removal of anticolonial or disobedient rulers. The most ambitious early study of withdrawal from the Gulf was written by a colonial administrator *par excellence*, Glencairn Balfour-Paul, who had carefully rehearsed the official version and sanitized it, removing any serious discussion of colonial coups that he had personally helped carry out.[18] This mirrored the efforts of writers with explicit colonial sympathies as well as authors who were formally or informally working for Gulf states.[19] Works produced by professional historians, in contrast, often oper-

[17] As is shown later in this article, there are some exceptions. The colonial coups in Morocco and Buganda achieved mass social mobilization and were ultimately reversed. They are accordingly discussed in fundamentally different ways than more successful colonial coups in the Gulf.

[18] Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge, 1991).

[19] J. B. Kelly, *The Collected Essays and Reviews of J. B. Kelly*, vol. 1: *Fighting the Retreat from Arabia and the Gulf*, ed. S. B. Kelly (London, 2013); Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The*

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ate within narrow parameters. Analytically, there is a debate on whether withdrawal from the Gulf resulted from long-term structural factors or historical contingency.[20] Empirically, many accounts reproduce newly released documents from British archives without adequately conceptualizing the problematic of the local state as it was shaped by colonial coups and the contest over decolonization that the region had so powerfully experienced at the time.[21]

On the more conservative end of the spectrum, some recent contributions suggest that the British presence in the Gulf started and continued at the behest of the local sheikhs; its termination, by implication, was a consequence of imperial choice rather than native pressure.[22] By retelling the old empire-by-invitation story, these works reproduce a necessary fiction that offers a rationale for Britain's specific form of decentralized rule in the Gulf.[23] They further overlook the essential distinction between agency and sovereignty. By focusing on the individual subjectivities of sheikhs, they veil the objective and systematic constraints that were placed on these rulers, obscuring the grand strategy of decentralized rule underlying the *Pax Britannica* in the region. While the general existence of such a grand strategy is acknowledged elsewhere in the literature, the important role of colonial coups, especially in the Gulf, is missing.[24]

These deficiencies in Gulf studies are matched in broader studies of colonialism and decolonization.[25] Much of the focus is on the imperial motives underlying withdrawal and

Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization (London, 2007); J. E. Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (Abingdon, 1986).

[20] Studies intervening in this discussion include Shohei Sato, "Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964–68: A Pattern and a Puzzle," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 99–117; Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke, 2002); and Jeffrey Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez: The Politics of Retrenchment* (Basingstoke, 1998).

[21] Simon C. Smith's *Ending Empire in the Middle East: Britain, the United States, and Post-war Decolonization, 1945–1973* (New York, 2012) focuses on Anglo-American rivalry and cooperation and its role in shaping the region. Helene von Bismarck's *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire* (London, 2013) pays greater attention to the contest between Britain and Arab nationalism, but that story is uncritically told and framed in British terms, and the important role of coups is not adequately addressed, buried in the detail reproduced from colonial memoranda and reports. Christopher M. Davidson provides a much more critical account in *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London, 2009), but his focus is on sketching an overview of the origins of Abu Dhabi and its contemporary politics; he only briefly discusses the coup that took place there in that context.

[22] The most extreme version of this empirically unsubstantiated thesis is to be found in James Onley, "Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection," CIRS Occasional Paper No. 4, 2009, Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558294/CIRSOccasionalPaper4JamesOnley2009.pdf. This develops a line of thought that Onley had pursued in his earlier work on the nineteenth century, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford, 2008).

[23] To believe in this account is to ignore the fact that the dynastic invitation was the effect, rather than the cause, of imperial entry. Old dynasties could not survive, and new ones could not be born, without British recognition. The gunboats, or the threat thereof, came before colonial treaties. Each treaty could be read as a textual merger of two moments: a moment of native submission and a moment of imperial recognition. The former always preceded the latter, something that every ruler was reminded of at his ascension: to be a ruler, a Gulf sheikh needed British recognition above anything else; to be recognized, he needed to commit to the treaty obligations recognized by his forefathers.

[24] Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (London, 2011).

[25] The pinnacle of orthodoxy in this field is *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Its general editor, Wm. Roger Louis, one of the most prolific authors on decolonization, counterposes the *raison d'être* of this massive collection to "the passions aroused by British imperialism," a barely masked negative refer-

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the nature of the metropolitan decision-making process. Major debates concentrate on whether the empire withdrew or was forced out; whether imperial actions were driven by class, military, monetary, ideological, or moral factors; and whether withdrawal was planned, occurred absentmindedly, or took place as a result of diffuse factors generated from different pivots tying the British "world system" together. Alternative areas of study focus on the practices, worldviews, and transnational connections underlying anticolonial movements; the cultural, discursive, and economic underpinnings of decolonization; and coercive measures such as colonial policing, counterinsurgency, military coercion, and incarceration.[26] There is, however, much that is left out about political violence that was inherent in the effort to impose or protect rulers and systems of rule that suited the empire rather than the populations whose lives it intervened in so consequentially. Aspects of that story have been told in the literature on the colonial origins of the postcolonial state, but the role of colonial coups has yet to be adequately highlighted even in that body of work.[27]

The inattentiveness to political history in postcolonial scholarship is partly to blame for this state of affairs. The move from the high political to the cultural, social, and economic, from kings and battles to the subaltern, was a radically important shift in scholarship. It nevertheless allowed imperial and official state accounts to dominate historiographies that are in dire need of contestation. This is certainly the case when it comes to the Gulf, a part of the world where imperial political engineering was exceedingly successful. Unusually, all the regimes and ruling families anchored by Britain in that area continue to survive to this day, and all of them remain connected to the Anglo-American economic, defensive, and political order. A basic question in the study of these regimes is often absent: Why is it that the Gulf did not witness something that happened elsewhere, a "transition from imperial to nationalist systems"?[28]

THIS QUESTION HAS considerable political, as well as historical, implications. It invites us to consider the relationship, embodied in colonial coups, between colonial strategy and democratic suppression. The varieties of despotism introduced by colonialism and reproduced by postcolonial states have been dissected by notable scholars such as Mah-

ence to anticolonial and postcolonial scholarship. Unsurprisingly, then, only a few chapters touch upon counterinsurgencies and other forms of coercion, a subject framed under the ideological title "defense and security." As for colonial coups, they do not feature at all. Wm. Roger Louis, "Foreword," in Judith Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4: *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), vii–x, here vii; Anthony Clayton, "'Deceptive Might': Imperial Defence and Security, 1900–1968," ibid., 280–305. For an early critique of the collection, see Madhavi Kale's excellent review in *Social History* 27, no. 2 (2002): 250–253.

[26] See, for example, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J., 2010); Darwin, *The Empire Project*; John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York, 2012); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York, 2008); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2014); Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame, 1945–80* (Manchester, 2006); Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Palo Alto, Calif., 2012); and Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York, 2005).

[27] Major examples from that literature include Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993); and Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York, 2001).

[28] David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing and Decolonisation: Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917–65* (Manchester, 1992), ix.

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mood Mamdani.[29] The "decentralized despotism" detected by Mamdani in sub-Saharan Africa, embodied in the propping up of native chiefs and the upholding of supposedly "customary rule," certainly had its echoes in the Gulf region before the discovery of oil.[30] The problem there, however, was not so much one of managing the relationship between town and country or settler and native. The principal issue was how to prevent the absorption of the Gulf into the broader region surrounding it, a region that was in the midst of a struggle to create an anticolonial bloc on a pan-Arab scale, one that could secure both political and economic sovereignty. Given the popular appeal of this project in the Nasserist era, this required, in colonial language, "defending Arabia."[31]

At the height of empire, internal defense ultimately depended on direct British military intervention. By the mid-twentieth century, however, it entailed utilizing oil revenues to develop the coercive as well as the co-optative capacities of local states. Externally, Britain defended native Gulf dynasts against absorption or domination by their far stronger Ottoman, Saudi, and Qajar neighbors throughout the nineteenth century and for the early part of the twentieth.[32] It continues to defend them today against the Iraqi, Saudi Arabian, and Iranian states, although it has been reduced to a junior partner since the U.S. placed its slippers by the bed following formal British withdrawal in 1971.[33] The protection of individual local rulers and their dynasty was, *ipso facto*, a defense of the imperial geostrategic and economic order to which they were connected as well as the anti-democratic political order over which they reigned.[34]

Before withdrawal, protection was justified on the basis of the treaties signed between Britain and local sheikhs. After withdrawal, protection was legitimated with reference to requests for security intervention from the sovereign rulers of the Gulf, who now had complete control over internationally recognized states that enjoyed membership in the United Nations. Before the British withdrawal, sheikhs were given a degree of power over oil concessions, state contracts, and foreign investment decisions. It was widely understood by British planners that withdrawal would also entail transferring power over defense arrangements as well as diplomatic affairs to the sheikhs. However, the functioning of the system depended on a clear and shared understanding of the *limits*

[29] An important exception, pertaining to Africa, is Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

[30] The limits of the term "despotism" in referring to Gulf rulers are discussed in Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 8.

[31] This is in fact the title of a characteristically conservative work on the subject: Peterson, *Defending Arabia*.

[32] This was far from a marginal endeavor. As Frederick Anscombe notes with reference to the Ottomans, "Rivalry in the Gulf was one of the persistent problems that soured Anglo-Ottoman relations before World War I." Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York, 1997), 2.

[33] External protection took military and diplomatic forms, as was amply evident in events such as the 1991 Gulf War. Protection against internal challengers could also ultimately take the form of naked force. Whenever the first line of defense, the sheikhs' gendarmes and troops, failed, imperial military intervention occurred. This continued well into the mid-1970s, as was seen in the British counterinsurgency effort against the Dhufar revolution in Oman. For an important analysis of this dynamic, see Khaldoun Hasan al-Naqeeb, *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula: A Different Perspective*, trans. L. M. Kenny (London, 1990), 59.

[34] Arab scholars often highlighted this fact throughout the 1960s. One notes, for example, that "even the agreements and treaties by which Britain tied the Sheikhs and Sultans of the Gulf to itself more than a century and a half ago to ensure the security of its path to India and the East have now been repurposed. Their function now is to protect Arab oil and the foreign companies that monopolize it." Salim Taha al-Takriti, *al-Siraʿ ʿala al-Khalij al-ʿArabi* (Baghdad, 1966), 105.

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to these powers, and colonial coups took place at precisely those moments when these limits were transgressed beyond the point of toleration.

For years, the only serious attempt to conceptualize this process came from revolutionaries in the region, as attested by the pamphlets that they produced on the subject.[35] Nevertheless, revolutionary works relied on circumstantial evidence rather than detailed empirical knowledge of colonial decision-making.[36] The eventual defeat of these revolutions significantly weakened the knowledge production related to them. Many of the colonial records, moreover, remain under lock and key, further confirming the continuing political relevance of colonial coups more than half a century later. This has resulted in the proliferation of inaccurate portrayals and conspiracy theories in the popular Arabic press and social media.[37] Fortunately, enough documents have escaped the censors. Augmented by Arab accounts and memoirs produced by rulers, regional diplomats, and revolutionaries, they make it possible for us to gain a detailed understanding of events.[38] By combining imperial and Arab source bases, we are able to arrive at a denser, and more contrapuntal, appreciation of colonial coups and the structures they helped perpetuate.

In order to appreciate the colonial coups in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah, we must go back to the world that preceded the removal of their rulers. Sheikh Shakhbout Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi began his reign in 1928, long before the end of the Indian Raj in 1947. Sheikh Saqr al-Qassimi of Sharjah assumed authority in 1951, at a time when vestiges of the Raj, even after its demise in India, were still alive and well in the Arab states of the Gulf. The setting that existed at the ascension of these rulers was completely altered by the time they were removed.[39] Following the Second World War, the Gulf lost its

[35] Besides underground radical publications, the 1960s also witnessed the proliferation of official anticolonial book series. These included, among many others, the series published by the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Guidance under the title "al-Silsila al-Siyasiyya" (the Political Series), which was concerned with "spreading political awareness among the entirety of the Arab peoples."

[36] For the most comprehensive revolutionary study of coups, see Al-Jabha al-Shaʿbiyya Li-Tahrir Oman wa-l-Khalij al-ʿArabi al-Muhtall, *Qatar wa-l-Istiʿmar al-Jadid wa-l-Inqilabat* (Beirut, 1972).

[37] Conspiracy theories abound in popular discussions of this subject. The infamous yellow press journalist Ussama Fawzi wrote on his widely read website *Arab Times*: "Shakhbout was a cultured man who had lived in Europe and hated the English. All the rumors about him are not true, and they were made up to expel him and hand the Sheikhdom over to his brother Zayed, who had mortgaged the country to the English companies. Shakhbout was not stingy, but he knew the needs and capacities of his country. When Britain suggested that he build a satellite station, he refused, because he knew that Britain wanted to drain the oil resources through projects that were not needed by the inhabitants of the Sheikhdom." Ussama Fawzi, "Muluk wa-Shuyukh wa-hal kana al-Malik Talal Majnunan?," *Arab Times*, December 29, 2005, http://www.arabtimes.com/osama/Doc65.htm. More recently, the Egyptian judge Walid Sharabi tweeted: "Abu Dhabi had a virtuous ruler that was loyal to his nation, which was Sheikh Shakhbout, so his younger brother Zayed removed him in 1966." @waleedsharaby, Twitter, https://twitter.com/waleedsharaby, March 1, 2015.

[38] I was fortunate enough to be the first scholar to study the unfinished memoirs of the late Michael Scott Weir (1925–2006), who was a leading British participant in planning the coups in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, and Oman. I am grateful to Avi Shlaim for sharing this valuable unpublished source. I also benefited from finding new documents in the British National Archives outlining important details relating to the coups that have not been treated elsewhere. I further utilized a variety of Arab documents and memoirs, including revolutionary pamphlets, interviews with Saqr al-Qassimi and poems written by him, and Arab press reports, as well as the memoirs of Sultan al-Qassimi, Issa al-Girg, Badr al-Badr, and Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi. Most of these sources have not been used elsewhere.

[39] For a broad overview of structural transformations in the Gulf during this period, see al-Naqeeb, *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula*, chaps. 4–7; Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (Reading, 1998).

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function as a buffer zone for the Raj, but it rose to prominence as a major source of British financial accumulation in the oil age. Geostrategically, it retained its importance for British East Asian theaters of operation and for the broader Cold War aim of preventing potential Soviet expansion.

The foremost challenge to Britain came from Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was actively working to expel the empire from the region as a whole. Another factor was the rise of local anticolonial movements after 1956 that sought alliances with Nasserism or were inspired by its precepts. Cairo's *Voice of the Arabs* radio station had an exceptionally wide listenership, leading Egyptian journalist Muhammad Hassanein Haikal to declare that "the transistor radio is the most powerful revolutionary force in our age."[40] Exposure to popular events and the media, the existence of transnational revolutionary movements, and the global rise of anticolonialism and its increasing diplomatic effectiveness in international fora meant that the continuation of overt British control had become unsustainable. Independence appeared inevitable, and by the end of the Suez crisis, British officials began to think seriously about the nature of the ruling systems that needed to be developed in the Gulf.

In his 1957 assessment of Britain's post-Suez position in the Gulf, British foreign secretary Selwyn Lloyd noted that pan-Arabism had already arrived in many parts of the region under Egyptian leadership, and it could "hardly be prevented" from spreading even further. The British thus needed to adapt their stance, deploying a "temporising policy." If change was inevitable, then Britain should endeavor to slow it down and "ensure that its purpose and the way it takes place" accorded with British interests. Structural and ideological transformations meant that the old ruling arrangements were strained. British administrators in the Gulf were convinced that "sooner or later the demand for reform will become sufficiently strong and insistent to compel some change in the present patriarchal system of government." The sheikhs needed change so as to "prevent the potential forces of opposition from mobilising sufficient strength to be able to overthrow their regimes." Otherwise, they would need to be "saved by outside, *i.e.*, British help"—something that was increasingly difficult for Britain to give.[41]

The British vision for the required change was anti-democratic. Indeed, it was emphasized that "any liberalisation of the régimes designed to meet genuine grievances or to mollify reformist elements shall not go so far as to cripple the powers of the Ruling Families or compel them to bow to nationalist demands at the expense of their own attachment to us." Rather, what was needed was "more efficient government" and "wider participation in the business of government."[42] This was deemed sufficient to absorb local pressures without impacting Britain's position, as democratic governance was bound to do.[43] In this context, five essential criteria emerged for the new model ruler: loyalty to Britain, disinterest in anticolonial ideology, pragmatic autocracy, enthusiasm for the

[40] Muhammad Hassanein Haikal, "Baritanya wa-l-Thawra fi al-Yaman," *Al-Ahram*, October 26, 1962.

[41] The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA], Cabinet Office, Cabinet Memoranda, CAB/129/87, C. (57) 138, "Persian Gulf," Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, June 7, 1957.

[42] Ibid.

[43] In Kuwait, this policy was attempted early on. The political restructuring and expansion of local governance structures took place at such a fast pace that the emirate was able to gain independence in 1961 and to have a functioning parliament a year later. For discussions of Kuwaiti independence from the standpoint of its political movements, see Falah al-Mdairis, *Malamih Awwaliyya Hawla Nash'at al-Tajammu'at wa-l-Tanzimat al-Siyasiyya fi al-Kuwait, 1938–1975* (Kuwait, 1994). For British policy see Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950–1965: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford, 1999).

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FIGURE 2: President Gamal Abdel Nasser receives Ernesto Che Guevara at Al Qubbah Republican Palace, June 15, 1959.

establishment of bureaucracies, and concern with the stimulation of local economic expansion.[44] The rulers who were overthrown failed to meet one or more of these benchmarks. Although Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah was an enthusiastic modernizer, he was openly sympathetic to pan-Arabism. Sheikh Shakhbout "yielded to no-one in his devotion to the British Raj," but he lacked interest in state-building, and was therefore resistant to the imperial grand regional design.[45] Notably, both Saqr and Shakhbout were seen as obstacles to Britain's ultimate goal of creating a federation among the Trucial States of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Umm al-Quwain, Ajman, and Fujeira.[46]

[44] A model ruler from Britain's perspective was Sheikh Rashid of Dubai. Rashid's modernization policies are discussed in Miriam Joyce, "On the Road towards Unity: The Trucial States from a British Perspective, 1960–1966," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 2 (1999): 45–60, here 46. Of course, colonial modernization has a much earlier history in the Arab world, as can be seen in several recent studies, most notably Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford, 2013). Modernization was also central to American imperial policy in the region. See Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945–1967* (Cambridge, 2016).

[45] Weir, memoirs, 32.

[46] Only two of these states, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, were viable on their own, and the British were concerned with federating them. The British considered Saqr an obstacle due to his distrust and "intense dislike" of Sheikh Rashid of Dubai, something that rendered cooperation between the two difficult. As for Shakhbout, he was considered by the British to have no interest in the future federation due to his supposedly "exaggerated sense of pride and importance." TNA, Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906–1966, FO 371/179905, William Luce (British Residency, Bahrain) to London, Dispatch No. 24, July 19, 1965.

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THE LONG-TERM PRESSURES that led to the deposition of Sheikh Saqr grew out of the rise of pan-Arabism and the regional transformations that accompanied it.[47] Saqr's particular investment in these transformations can be understood in light of his upbringing. During his youth he explored the Arab literary canon, along with his close friends Sultan al-Oweis and Khalfan bin Misbeh. As al-Oweis recalls, "we had a literary culture in common that united us, and we all began to write poetry."[48] Since the Arab literary renaissance of the *Nahda*, this culture had been shared by a broad community of intellectuals from across the Arab world. As a young man, Sheikh Saqr corresponded with members of that community. In 1952 he visited Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, and he began spending his summers in Damascus, befriending leading thinkers and poets.[49] In subsequent years, he went on to establish closer bonds with Cairo, the leading capital of modern Arab culture. The cultivation of this literary sensibility was accompanied by his entry into a shared moral universe. No figure played as prominent a role in shaping the precepts that structured that universe as Gamal Abdel Nasser. Within that world, independence and Arab unity were not simply material demands, but axiomatic principles.[50] It was in this context that Sheikh Saqr was received by Nasser no fewer than six times between 1954 and 1965, despite the clash between Egypt and Britain in the region.[51]

In light of Sheikh Saqr's background, it is unsurprising that he began his reign by attempting to "modernize" Sharjah, especially in the field of education.[52] On a political level, he was deeply influenced by the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe) and the Algerian Revolution. He strongly opposed the 1956 tripartite aggression against Egypt and began to surround himself with advisors and administrators hailing from that country.[53] This was a trend that was also propelled by the extreme poverty of his state, and his openness to receiving Egyptian and broader Arab development support.[54]

The turn to Egypt deeply disturbed the British. Their repeated complaints to the ruler about his closeness to Cairo finally reached a crescendo over the question of relations with the Arab League. In March 1964, the league's Political Committee decided to

[47] This point is emphasized in Kristi N. Barnwell, "Overthrowing the Shaykhs: The Trucial States at the Intersection of Anti-Imperialism, Arab Nationalism, and Politics, 1952–1966," *Arab Studies Journal* 24, no. 2 (2016): 72–95.

[48] "Khalfan bin Misbih," Al-Muntada al-ʿArabi al-Muwahhad, http://www.4uarab.com/vb/forum.php, accessed May 25, 2013.

[49] Interview with Sheikh Saqr al-Qassimi on the television program *Dafatir al-Ayyam*, episode 37, Studio al-Urdun and al-Sharika al-Urduniyya li-l-Intaj al-Tilfizyuni wa-l-Idhaʻi wa-l-Cinimaʼi (n.d.), http://www.istikana.com/ar/episodes/daftar-alayam-37.

[50] The influence and popularity of Nasserism in Sharjah and the other Trucial States during this period is discussed in Mufid al-Zaydi, *Al-Tayyarat al-Fikriyya fi al-Khalij al-ʾArabi* (Beirut, 2000), 206.

[51] This was on September 11, 1954; September 18, 1955; September 17, 1958; August 31, 1959; September 19, 1960; and August 10, 1962. President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egyptian Documents, Days of Nasser from the Egyptian Press, http://nasser.org/Days/DaysAll.aspx?CS=5&x=5&lang=ar (Arabic), http://www.nasser.org/Days/DaysAll.aspx?CS=0&x=5&lang=en (English).

[52] Saqr's small emirate did not have adequate means, so he sought extensive help from richer Arab states. In 1953, his appeal to Kuwait led to the establishment of the first modern school in Sharjah. Badr Khalid al-Badr, *Rihla maʿ Qafilat al-Hayat, al-Juzʾan al-Thani wa-l-Thalith* (Kuwait, 2004), 42.

[53] This was in line with popular sentiment in Sharjah and neighboring emirates, something that is explored in Muhammad Mursi Abdullah, *Dawlat al-Imarat al-ʿArabiyya al-Muttahida wa-Jiranuha* (Kuwait, 1981), 196. For the intersection between Nasserist politics and Egyptian expatriates in the Gulf in that period, see Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Nasser's Educators and Agitators across *al-Watan al-ʿArabi*: Tracing the Foreign Policy Importance of Egyptian Regional Migration, 1952–1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 3 (2016): 324–341.

[54] For Sharjah's "grim" economic prospects and Saqr's search for Arab aid, see Barnwell, "Overthrowing the Shaykhs," 82–83.

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send a "mission of brotherhood" to the Trucial States to investigate conditions there.[55] It was a high-level undertaking. Aside from Arab League secretary general Abdel Khaliq Hassouna and deputy secretary general Dr. Sayed Nofal, it included personal envoys of the king of Saudi Arabia, the president of Iraq, and the emir of Kuwait, representing the three independent Arab countries whose shores touched the Gulf. The group arrived in Sharjah on October 30, 1964, where they were met with a spectacular popular reception.[56]

After the return of the mission, Hassouna submitted its report to the Arab League on November 24, 1964, recommending the establishment of a special fund to support the poorer Trucial States, and the formation of a technical committee to investigate their specific developmental needs in greater detail. The committee was comprised of nine experts under the leadership of the renowned Egyptian specialist on dams Dr. Muhammad Ahmad Salim. They spent ten days in the region in December 1964, producing a 150-page report upon their return.[57] The reports of the mission and the technical committee were considered by the Council of Arab Prime Ministers during its session in Cairo from January 9 to 12, 1965. Among other decisions, the council called for "joint efforts to support sister emirates and help them gain freedom and progress" by means of acting on the recommendation to establish the special fund. This effort would be overseen by a standing committee, whose activities would be reported periodically by the Arab League secretary general. A sum of 1,000,000 pounds sterling was initially committed to that effort, and it was agreed that Nofal would visit the Trucial States to offer this proposed aid to their rulers.[58]

This was the first time the Trucial States had experienced external diplomatic engagement on this scale, subject as they were to treaties that placed all of their foreign affairs under British control. The seriousness of this engagement, the popular anticolonial sentiments it unleashed, the revolutionary pan-Arab context in which it took place, and the enthusiasm it generated even within ruling families caused deep anxieties for British officials. They were concerned that the Arab League mission might provide an opening for Nasser to undercut the British presence. They especially feared that Sheikh Saqr would be only too eager to establish close cooperation, and reformulate his relationship with Britain on that basis.

Balfour-Paul, the acting political agent in Dubai, was authorized by Sir William Luce, the political resident in Bahrain, to speak to Sheikh Saqr "without reserve," using

[55] This took place following the convening of the First Arab Summit in Cairo in January 1964, an event that laid the groundwork for greater interest in the Gulf. Muhammad Hassan al-ʿAidarus, *Dawlat al-Imarat al-ʿArabiyya al-Muttahida: Min al-Istiʿmar li-l-Istiqlal* (Dubai, 2002), 211. The question of the "Arabness of the Gulf" was discussed in the Arab press, due not least to rumored Iranian designs on Abu Musa, an island that was protected by Britain as part of Sharjah at the time, as well as general fears of a demographic de-Arabization of the region. In light of these and other anxieties, the Arab League convened a special meeting concerned with the Gulf on March 11, 1964. That meeting decreed the dispatch of the Arab League mission to investigate conditions on the ground. Al-Badr, *Rihla maʿ Qafilat al-Hayat, al-Juzʾan al-Thani wa-l-Thalith*, 276.

[56] The Kuwaiti representative al-Badr recalls: "as soon as we arrived at the frontiers of Sharjah, we saw Sheikh Saqr with his men and the notables of the territory assembled, and behind them there were large masses of people, and some of them were carrying welcoming signs . . . it seemed to any observer that all of Sharjah had come out to celebrate a great day like none it had ever seen before." *Rihla maʿ Qafilat al-Hayat, al-Juzʾan al-Thani wa-l-Thalith*, 300.

[57] Ibid., 313.

[58] Ibid., 315, 321.

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whatever instruments he chose to "pin him politically to the wall."[59] Balfour-Paul accordingly "invited him to call" on January 27, 1965, a rather aggressive act in and of itself, in that the sheikh was forced to come to the political agent rather than the other way around. The ruler was told that "many people . . . and not by any means all of them British, were gravely disturbed by the extent to which he had involved himself with the U.A.R." Balfour-Paul explained that there were two interpretations of the ruler's actions. The "kinder" one was that "he [had] weakly allowed himself to become the plaything of the Egyptians." The other was that "he had positively and deliberately thrown his lot with Cairo regardless of the fact . . . that Nasser was out to destroy stability in the region and the system of sheikhly rule on which it depended." Balfour-Paul pointed out to Sheikh Saqr that he had filled his administration with Egyptians and that his "fulsome response to the Arab League (which in practice meant Egyptian) initiatives in the area" was being closely observed.[60] He finally informed Saqr that while he still "regarded him as a friend," he wished "to put to him fair and square this question: Was he or was he not loyal to the Agreement he had signed with Her Majesty's Government on his accession, whose terms he well knew?" If Sheikh Saqr was still loyal, "then his behaviour needed a good deal of explanation." If he was not, then "he could hardly expect Her Majesty's Government to stand idly by."[61]

According to Balfour-Paul, Sheikh Saqr reassured him that he "knew full well that his survival depended on British backing" and that he was committed to upholding his agreement with Her Majesty's Government. He further took the opportunity to distance himself from Nasserism. However, instead of articulating his rejection of the anticolonial elements of that ideology—a line that would hardly have been accepted as plausible given his well-known views and actions—he focused on Arab socialism, saying that he "had no desire at all" to be its "victim" and become a "penniless exile." He further stated that "if he made mistakes in his administration, he was only too glad to accept correction and advice."[62]

This discussion reflected the power relations then existing between the political agent and the sheikh. Both were rehearsing familiar colonial roles: the paternalist British administrator and the prodigal client ruler. To echo a long-held view among Gramscian historians, all ruling classes "confront the problem of coercion in such a way as to minimize the necessity for its use."[63] This is why there was so much reliance on *double entendre* in this meeting and others of its kind. Beneath the cover of polite formulations, Saqr was confronted with his unacceptable insubordination, and the possibility of severe punishment was raised should he continue to challenge established imperial authority.[64]

As time went on, Saqr failed to show that he was redeemable, continuing to promote the Arab League plan to neighboring rulers and damaging British plans to thwart it. In March, the acting political agent was still describing him as a figure "under Egyptian influence."[65] A series of actions undertaken by Sheikh Saqr during a visit by Nofal on

[59] TNA, FO 371/179902, Balfour-Paul (Dubai) to Luce (Bahrain), January 27, 1965.
[60] Ibid.; parentheses in original.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976), 26.
[64] TNA, FO 371/179902, Balfour-Paul (Dubai) to Luce (Bahrain), January 27, 1965.
[65] TNA, FO 371/179902, Balfour-Paul (Dubai) to Luce (Bahrain), March 3, 1965.

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May 9–13, 1965, led the British to finally depose him. Just before the visit, British officials predicted that Saqr would create an opening for Nasserism in the region: "Sheikh Saqr's Arab nationalist inclinations make him the weakest link in our defence against penetration of the Gulf by the Egyptians and the Iraqis . . . If the Arab League were to seek his permission to establish an Arab League Office at Sharjah he would almost certainly grant it without reference to us."[66]

This prediction proved accurate. With the exception of Sheikh Shakhbout, Nofal visited each of the rulers of the Trucial States, asking them to sign a letter addressed to the secretary general welcoming Arab League support. He also presented each of them with the Arab Plan for Technical Cooperation, which was geared to the individual needs of each state. Nofal secured the signatures of all the rulers except for the staunchly pro-British Sheikh Rashid of Dubai. He achieved even better results with Saqr and his cousin and namesake Saqr al-Qassimi of Ras al-Khaimah, and the two sheikhs formally invited the Arab League to open offices in their emirates.[67]

Nofal's visit coincided with a tour of the Gulf by the British minister of state, George Thompson, which was focused on thwarting the Arab League plan. In his capacity as political resident, Luce advised the minister that Britain could not afford a challenge to its exclusive position in the region, and that Saqr must be required to withhold permission for the opening of an Arab League office. Thompson, Luce, Balfour-Paul, and the Arabian Department's Michael Scott Weir met to settle Saqr's fate. The details are recounted in Weir's unpublished memoirs, reproduced here for the first time:

> The three of us, together with . . . Balfour-Paul, sat for hours poring over the early 19th century treaties to be sure of the legal ground, and having been duly satisfied proceeded to a solemn meeting with the Ruler at which the Minister informed him that if the Ruler allowed the proposal to go ahead he would put himself in breach of his treaty obligations to HMG. Shaikh Saqr replied, in effect but more dignified language, "so what?"[68]

This gave rise to what Weir was to eventually describe as a "classical imperialist solution" to a "classical imperial crisis."[69] Confronted with Sheikh Saqr's *non possumus*, Luce recommended that he be deposed. The alternative, in his view, was for Britain to be seen "to have given way to Nasserist pressure" and risk having its position in the Gulf "fatally undermined."[70] Thompson concurred with this assessment, and the coup plan was set in motion right after his return to London. Since the British had "no constitutional power to depose a ruler," it was agreed that a letter of deposition would be solicited from senior ruling family members, and that the coup would be presented as the result of an al-Qassimi council decision. Balfour-Paul was "instructed" to invite Sheikh Saqr to the British Political Agency, where he would "present him with evidence of his family's disaffection and (if he didn't go quietly) take him under arrest to a waiting RAF aircraft to be flown in disgrace to Bahrain." Although Balfour-Paul managed to send the invitation, he fell ill two days before the agreed date. In his words, "the

[66] TNA, FO 371/179902, Minister of State's Visit to the Persian Gulf, May 9–16, 1965.
[67] Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 134.
[68] Weir, memoirs, 80. An extensive account of the conversation between Thompson and Sheikh Saqr can be found in Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qassimi, *Sard al-Dhat* (Cairo, 2009), 242–247.
[69] Weir, memoirs, 79.
[70] Ibid., 80.

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FIGURE 3: Dubai Creek, November 1949. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2004.130.25287.1.

deputy PR had to fly down to Dubai and conduct this exercise in 'indirect rule' on my behalf."[71]

Sheikh Saqr was invited to visit the Political Agency on June 24, 1965. There he was asked "to leave Sharjah at once," and a paper was waved in front of him that was, in the words of one of his notable countrymen, "alleged to be the record" of his "family council's decision" to depose him.[72] After some protestation on his part, he was arrested by a Trucial Oman Scouts detachment led by Major Jack Briggs.[73] Two British officers and "their escort of two land rovers carrying men of the Trucial Oman Scouts" forcibly drove him to the airport, where he was put on a Royal Air Force (RAF) plane and flown off to Bahrain.[74] Reflecting on this event many years later, Weir wrote: "I came to regard the episode as a rather shameful over-reaction on our part to a threat that we had probably exaggerated." He noted that there was "a piquant contradiction in the fact that the first decisive move by a Labour government anxious to modernise the shaikhly system and Britain's relationship with it should have been to depose the one shaikh holding socialist ideas, in order to protect the system and the imperial status quo."[75] This guilty confession—belated, reserved, and buried in an unfinished memoir—reflected one of the more significant ironies of modern Arab history: the fact that Western social demo-

[71] Glencairn Balfour-Paul, *Bagpipes in Babylon: A Lifetime in the Arab World and Beyond* (London, 2006), 198, 198–199, 199.

[72] TNA, FO 371/179904, Bahrain to Foreign Office, No. 570, June 30, 1965; Easa Saleh Al-Gurg, *The Wells of Memory: An Autobiography* (London, 1998), 120.

[73] Weir, memoirs, 80.

[74] TNA, FO 371/179904, Cairo Telegram No. 43, Bahrain to Foreign Office, June 30, 1965.

[75] Weir, memoirs, 80.

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crats and liberals battled progressive forces that shared their proclaimed values so as to entrench a deeply conservative order that accorded with their immediate interests.

As with all colonial coups that were successful over the long term, there were two preconditions for the removal of Saqr: the weakness of native forces of resistance that were connected to the ruler, and the existence of a suitable figure willing to take his place. The former condition existed in all the Trucial States, including Sharjah. At least since the creation of the Trucial Oman Scouts, the British had enjoyed a local monopoly on violence.[76] Confronting this monopoly would have required the development of an effective mechanism of social mobilization that could be used for anticolonial ends, something that was certainly taking place, but not fast enough.[77] Moreover, the abundance of succession conflicts right across the Trucial States, spurred by the absence of primogeniture, meant that there was no shortage of relatives waiting for their chance to seize power. Wherever a ruling family was afflicted by hatred and envy, whenever a sheikhly son or a cousin sensed that his rights were being denied or his status undermined, there was a potential for schemes that the colonial power could exploit.

Such was the condition of the Qassimi dynasty in Sharjah.[78] One of its most protracted internal conflicts was directly connected to the death of Saqr's father, Sheikh Sultan, in 1951. Saqr succeeded his father despite the fact that his uncle Muhammad had been regent from 1949 to 1951. The latter's six sons were embittered, feeling that their rightful inheritance was usurped. Perhaps none of them harbored as much animus toward the ruler as the eldest, Khalid, who had completely severed relations with Sheikh Saqr in 1956, moving to Dubai, where he went into business selling paint. There he continued to assert his claim, wallowing in desperation and writing anonymous letters to the Political Agency complaining of Saqr's misrule.[79]

Khalid's cause against his cousin was all but lost until Her Majesty's Government decided to enlist him in the attempt to replace Sheikh Saqr, something that he was decidedly eager to do. British records suggest that he was supported in this endeavor by his brothers and by Sheikh Rashid of Dubai.[80] Khalid was offered recognition on the

[76] For a history of the Trucial Oman Scouts, see Michael Mann, *The Trucial Oman Scouts: The Story of a Bedouin Force* (Norwich, 1994).

[77] Popular anticolonial mobilization had successfully developed in Kuwait during the 1950s, playing a major role in the British withdrawal from that territory. However, the social conditions in Kuwait differed from those in Sharjah in particular, and the Trucial States in general. The best discussion of the Kuwaiti political movements and atmosphere in that period is still Falah al-Mdairis, "The Arab Nationalist Movement in Kuwait from Its Origins to 1970" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1987).

[78] Out of Saqr's four brothers living in neighboring Dubai, three were in official exile and would have possibly favored taking the place of their brother. However, the eldest among them, Khalid, was deemed by British officials to be a "hard drinking and highly unreliable character who would not have been acceptable to the family." His seniority would "presumably have blocked the chances of his younger brothers." As for Saqr's other brother, Abdullah, he was described as a "drug taker" and a "figure of no conceivable importance." Accordingly, the British had to fish in another pond. TNA, FO 371/179904, Luce (Bahrain) to Brenchley (Foreign Office), July 5, 1965.

[79] TNA, FO 371/179904, "Personality Note on Shaikh Khalid bin Mohamed al-Qasimi," July 5, 1965.

[80] This was only partially true, for his youngest brother, Sultan—the current ruler of Sharjah—was disappointed by the colonial nature of the coup. Al-Qassimi, *Sard al-Dhat*, 252. Sheikh Sultan's narrative is interesting in that it diverges from official versions that obscure the fact that the coup was launched by the British. This has much to do with his pan-Arabist background. It also has to do with the fact that he himself was not installed by the British, and accordingly he does not need to hide what took place. By accu-

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FIGURE 4: Sheikh Shakhbout bin Sultan Al Nahyan (center) next to the wall of al-Hosn Palace, standing with his brothers Sheikh Hazaa (second from the left) and Sheikh Khalid (second from the right), April 1948. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2004.130.17651.1.

day after the deposition of Saqr, on the condition that he would "fully accept the obligations arising out of the agreements, treaties, usages and customs" that his predecessors had "undertaken towards Her Majesty's Government."[81] He responded in the manner expected of a client ruler:

> On this occasion, Your Excellency, I offer my thanks and gratitude to Her Majesty's Government and I assure you that I shall carry out all obligations, treaties, agreements, usages and customs which were undertaken in the past by my predecessors. I shall also maintain and fully preserve the traditional friendship binding us together. Please be assured that I shall fulfil your trust in me.[82]

With this response, Sheikh Khalid officially became recognized as the ruler of Sharjah, and he immediately set out to reverse the pan-Arabist policies of his predecessor. Of course, there was no question that the Arab League would not be opening an office under his watch, and only one of the high-ranking Egyptian officials that Saqr had previously employed, the *qadi* (judge), was allowed to remain in Sharjah.[83] This outcome served as a warning to neighboring sheikhs. The rulers of Ajman and Um al-Quwain immediately agreed to write to the Arab League, requesting that any aid be channeled through the British-controlled Trucial States Development Fund. As for the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, he initially expressed resistance, protesting the deposition of Sheikh Saqr. However, he became fearful at the prospect of being replaced himself, eventually sub-

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rately presenting himself as an anticolonial young man in the days of the coup, Sheikh Sultan actually contributes to his own legitimation. While he is admirably forthcoming in the way he addresses the coup in his memoirs, there is an absence of a broader national conversation on this sensitive subject.

[81] TNA, FO 371/179904, translation of letter from Sir William Luce, June 25, 1965.

[82] Ibid.

[83] TNA, FO 371/179904, Luce (Bahrain) to Brenchley (Foreign Office), July 5, 1965.

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mitting to British requirements.[84] The only ruler who failed to heed the warning of Sharjah was Sheikh Shakhbout.

While Sheikh Saqr was too much of an anticolonial modernizer for British officials, Sheikh Shakhbout was too reactionary. He was one of the "eccentric" characters so commonly produced by the British Raj: limited in education, provincial in outlook, and deeply suspicious of change. The discovery of oil in 1958 led to the immediate integration of his sheikhdom into global capitalism, something that he was evidently unable to manage. Although he was an ideal figure in the heyday of colonialism, he stood out as an obstacle in the era of colonial restructuring. He had no interest in state-building and possessed a skewed understanding of economic affairs.[85] This frustrated the British men on the spot.[86] Since 1962, at least, leading officials, including Sir William Luce and Colonel Hugh Boustead, had been convinced of the need to remove him.[87]

Some studies have suggested that Sheikh Shakhbout's failure to develop Abu Dhabi was the main bone of contention between him and these figures.[88] This is not entirely accurate. Although they were unhappy with his internal policy in Abu Dhabi, British officials were more immediately concerned about his failure to further their core vision for a federation of emirates in the Trucial States. In the words of a key report, Shakhbout's "chief disadvantage from the British point of view is not so much his bad government as his refusal to cooperate with his fellow Rulers in developing their States or in laying the basis of an eventual Trucial States Federation."[89] British officials feared that a failure to secure funding for these emirates would serve the cause of anticolonialism. Thus, one of the major goals of a British ministerial visit that took place in May 1965 was to communicate to Sheikh Shakhbout the following message:

> The Arab League's attempts to penetrate the Trucial States pose a very serious threat not only to the British position in the Gulf but to the rulers themselves. It is within Abu Dhabi's power to make a most valuable contribution to meeting this threat by giving substantial help to the development of the poorer Trucial States which it can well afford especially if the

[84] Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 154.

[85] For the sake of generating better state revenues and reducing the potential of future instability, Britain and the oil companies attempted to convince Shakhbout to improve the terms of the concession treaties he had signed with the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company in 1939. They suggested a new treaty that would raise his income from 15 percent to 50 percent of oil proceeds. In what was probably an unprecedented move in the history of oil, the sheikh stubbornly rejected this proposal, insisting that he receive lower revenues! TNA, FO 371/179902, Minister of State's Visit to the Persian Gulf, May 9–16, 1965. One plausible interpretation of this odd decision is distrust of the metropole in relation to finances. The sheikh may have believed that the empire and its companies were scheming to reduce his wealth by altering longstanding arrangements.

[86] British archives from the 1960s are filled with assessments along the following lines: "The Ruler of Abu Dhabi contributes in great measure to our difficulties in the Trucial States. Shakhbut . . . is neither intellectually nor temperamentally equipped to handle the enormous revenues suddenly falling to his State . . . Despite our constant pressure he has made little attempt to develop his State in the way in which his people expect, he has refused to provide any money for the development of his poorer neighbours (except a token £25,000 for a hydrological survey) and he has earned the general hostility of the Arab world by his capricious and inconsiderate behaviour." TNA, FO 371/179902, Minister of State's Visit to the Persian Gulf, May 9–16, 1965.

[87] Von Bismarck, *Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 170.

[88] Uzi Rabi, "Oil Politics and Tribal Rulers in Eastern Arabia: The Reign of Shakhbut (1928–1966)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 37–50, here 48.

[89] TNA, FO 371/179902, Minister of State's Visit to the Persian Gulf, May 9–16, 1965.

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> Ruler were to conclude fifty-fifty agreements with his oil companies. H.M.G. are most concerned at his failure to follow the course which seems to be dictated both by common sense and by his duty to his less fortunate brethren.[90]

Once again, Sheikh Shakhbout failed to follow this "advice." His cumulative record of rejecting imperial directives resulted in the long-term pressure that eventually led to his removal the following year. However, there were offsetting factors that delayed this removal, the most important of which was his complete submission to empire in foreign affairs.[91] Whereas Sheikh Saqr posed a manifest threat that was seen to require prompt action, Sheikh Shakhbout constituted a latent risk that did not carry the same urgency. Accordingly, although British officialdom in the Gulf was advocating immediate deposition, Whitehall did not always share that position.[92] What, then, was the trigger that initiated his removal?

The answer lies in Al Nahyan family dynamics, a matter that invites us to consider another aspect of colonial coups in the Gulf. These events were the product not only of a two-way interaction between the ruler and imperium, but also of a triangular dynamic involving dynasties. The presence of these political kinship formations, as we saw earlier in the case of Sharjah, afforded the empire a field of candidates competing for the position of ruler. Under normal conditions, Britain tended, for the sake of stability, to stand by the rulers in power. Whereas internal dynastic conflict often took place, sometimes leading to a change in leadership, this was not a phenomenon that was generally favored by the empire, leading as it did to political instability, which was especially dreaded after the discovery of oil. By creating an organized local defense force led by British officers, the Trucial Oman Scouts, Britain reduced this potential internal instability. This gave rulers greater authority over their dynasties than ever before. Moments of tension between empire and ruler, however, created openings for direct coordination between Britain and dynastic contenders. Should it wish to remove a ruler, the empire needed to be able to depend on a suitable candidate for replacement, but such a candidate could not ascend to rule without securing imperial approval.

Sheikh Shakhbout's relationship with his brothers had become increasingly tense, especially after the discovery of oil. He resisted delegating authority, which is not surprising given the fratricidal history of succession in his sheikhdom.[93] Besides the Trucial Oman Scouts, one of the factors that stabilized Sheikh Shakhbout's rule was the presence of the matriarch of Abu Dhabi, his mother, Sheikha Salma bint Butti. Her sons had all sworn an oath to her not to engage in fratricide, and she thus effectively barred any action against Shakhbout.[94] Despite this oath, in May 1963 Sheikhs Zayed and

[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 174.
[93] His father, Sultan (r. 1922–1926), had ascended to the throne following the assassination of his brother Hamdan (r. 1912–1922); Sultan was then assassinated by his other brother, Saqr (r. 1926–1929); and Saqr was finally assassinated by the Manasir tribe. This explains Shakhbout's style of rule, which is described by Ahmed Al-Shahi in "Editor's Preface," in Peter Lienhardt, *Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, ed. Al-Shahi (Basingstoke, 2001), viii–xx, here ix–xi.
[94] For an overview of the cycle of fratricide in Abu Dhabi, see Clarence Mann, *Abu Dhabi: Birth of an Oil Shaikhdom* (Beirut, 1964), 77–83; Ali Mohammed Khalifa, *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation* (Boulder, Colo., 1979), 104–105.

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Khalid and their cousin Muhammad plotted his removal in coordination with Britain. In the end their plot was not carried out, possibly because Sheikh Shakbhout was able to "bribe" Sheikh Khalid at the last minute. The bottom then fell out of another plan, authorized by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in December 1964, when Sheikh Zayed lost his nerve.[95] Shakhbout, however, failed to keep his brothers on his side in the following months, giving them less financial support than they were demanding. Finally, the leading members of the family met in mid-May of 1966, deciding "that they would refuse to accept any money from Shakhbut unless he conceded that he would make clear to all concerned how much money he allocated to the family as a whole, and the sizes of individual allowances."[96]

By this point, Sheikh Shakhbout's brothers had "managed to square their consciences in relation to the undertaking they had given long ago to their formidable mother."[97] They rallied behind their brother Sheikh Zayed, who was a tried and tested leader in the family, having served as the highly successful governor of the Buraimi region for many years. Zayed had long advocated the removal of his brother and presented himself to the British authorities as a modernizing alternative.[98] At the beginning of the summer of 1966, he approached the political agent, reiterating his demand for Her Majesty's Government to remove Shakhbout. He was informed that "this was not in the hands of H.M.G. and that any such move must be made by all members of the ruling family acting in agreement." Significantly, however, he was also told that "if he produced a decree signed by the senior members of the ruling family, H.M.G. would assist in the implementation of their wishes."[99] At first glance, this may suggest that the coup was an outcome of the agency of the ruling family, but of particular interest is the limited agency evident in this case: Sheikh Zayed and his brothers did not have the capacity to carry out a coup without British initial interest, final approval, and ultimate implementation.

Sheikh Zayed was persistent in seeking British intervention. He conducted further negotiations with Foreign Office officials in London during his summer leave there in July 1966, making it "clear that the brothers would be prepared if necessary to tell Shakhbut it was time to go." Accordingly, a plan was drawn up by the Arabian Department and approved by ministers. In the words of Weir, "it was on similar lines to the operation in Sharjah a year earlier, except it was expected that Shakhbut would agree to go quietly and there would be no question of using force."[100] The D-day was set for Saturday, August 6.[101] Sheikh Zayed returned to Abu Dhabi on Friday, July 29, and convened a meeting of senior family members in Buraimi the following Wednesday. In accordance with British wishes, they wrote a document stating: "Impelled by the lamentable condition of our country and by misrule, inefficiency, and mental instability of

[95] Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf*, 172, 181.

[96] Rabi, "Oil Politics and Tribal Rulers in Eastern Arabia," 49. Much against his inclination, Shakhbout was pressured into drawing up a development plan and appointing his brother Zayed as president of the Finance Department. This, however, was too little too late.

[97] Weir, memoirs, 81.

[98] Davidson, *Abu Dhabi*, 41–42.

[99] TNA, FO 371/185529, P. Gent (Arabian Department) to S. J. Nuttall (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), September 2, 1966.

[100] Weir, memoirs.

[101] In his memoirs, Weir incorrectly notes that this happened in June, during the queen's official birthday celebration, clearly confusing that event with the birthday of the Queen Mother on Thursday, August 4, 1966. Both events would have been celebrated on a Saturday; hence the confusion.

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FIGURE 5: Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2004.130.22244.1.

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Sheikh Shakhbut and his rejection of all advice, we, heads and lawful representatives of the ruling family have decided to depose him and have elected Sheikh Zayid in his place."[102] The political agent was presented with the document the next day at noon.

On the following day, August 6, the British RAF transported two Trucial Oman Scouts squadrons to Abu Dhabi to provide the necessary military backing for the coup.[103] As the acting political resident, Balfour-Paul called on Sheikh Shakhbout in his al-Hosn Palace.[104] He entered the *Majlis* confidently and asked for all the guests to be dismissed. The request was heeded, and only the sheikh's secretary and eleven bodyguards remained. The sheikh was presented with his family's decision to depose him and was "formally" asked to "abdicate in favour of his brother Zayid." Facing resistance, Balfour-Paul spent forty minutes "advising" him to "abdicate with dignity." After finally losing patience, he "demanded that the body guards leave the Palace, which apparently they immediately did without waiting for any counter instructions from the ruler." Soldiers from the British-led Trucial Oman Scouts entered with their machine guns and surrounded Shakhbout. Balfour-Paul then informed him that he had "ten minutes to pack a bag" before being taken to the airport. The sheikh "refused to pack or even move, and on the instructions of the Political Resident was dragged by the soldiers out of the Palace to the Political Agent's car." He "stood outside the Palace a sad and bedraggled figure. He declined to enter the car, from which the Union Jack had been removed, and had to eventually be pushed into the back seat by one of the soldiers." He was driven to the airport, surrounded by a convoy of Trucial Oman Scouts trucks and a Land Rover carrying Balfour-Paul. Upon arrival at the tarmac, the sheikh "refused to alight from the car and two soldiers had to literally drag him out. Finally, with tears streaming down his face and walking very slowly the Ex-Ruler was led by two Officers to the plane and was helped aboard."[105]

Although they differed in form, the coups in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi shared much in substance. They were launched by the same small group of planners.[106] They had recurring, almost ritualistic, elements: the performative humiliation of the native ruler, the obsessive legalism and concern with abdication letters and family decisions, the reliance on British military officers and RAF planes. They were—by virtue of their locations, targets, motivations, and beneficiaries—strictly colonial phenomena, carried out within protected states that were under foreign control and were still undergoing a process of state formation. They entailed the replacement by a colonial military force of a client hereditary ruler with another from the same dynasty. They were overwhelmingly preemptive in their un-

[102] TNA, FO 371/185527, Abu Dhabi to Foreign Office, August 5, 1966. The document was signed by leading figures of the two wings of the ruling family, with Sheikh Muhammad bin Khalifa signing his name on behalf of the sons of Khalifa, and Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan ratifying on behalf of the sons of Sultan. See FO 371/185529, P. Gent (Arabian Department) to S. J. Nuttall (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), September 2, 1966.

[103] TNA, FO 371/185527, Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office to Certain Missions, August 6, 1966.

[104] Although the official record of this encounter has not been released, I found a highly significant document based on what the British Arabian Department described as a "detailed and largely accurate" account provided by the director of the British Bank in Abu Dhabi. TNA, FO 371/185529, P. Gent (Arabian Department) to S. J. Nuttall (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), September 2, 1966.

[105] Ibid.

[106] For instance, William Luce and Michael Scott Weir played a key role in both coups, as well as the coup in Oman.

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derlying causes, seeking to protect the future of colonial space and political relations from undesirable forces. Significantly, even when they intersected with the political agenda of a local constituency, they were primarily oriented toward serving imperial interests.[107]

Having successfully carried out the two coups in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, British authorities were confronted with the task of legitimating them. The British press contributed to this process. When a *Daily Telegraph* journalist received an accurate leaked account of the Abu Dhabi coup, he shared it with the News Department of the Foreign Office. Officials there convinced him not to publish it on the grounds that it "contained so many errors as not to be worth printing."[108] The coups were presented as having been carried out by the ruling families and were justified by debasing the previous rulers in a manner that did not threaten continued submission to the status quo. In Sharjah, this meant emphasizing the ruler's lack of adherence to tradition; in Abu Dhabi, it involved criticizing the ruler's traditionalism. Sheikh Shakhbout was easy to handle: he had a well-established reputation as a reactionary figure, and the contrast between his parsimony and Sheikh Zayed's developmental outlook was genuinely striking.

The case of Sheikh Saqr proved more complicated. Sir William Luce advised that "emphasis in publicity should be placed on his squandering of State revenues abroad, on his personal pleasures in places like Beirut, and the public destruction [by] his successor of 36 cases of whiskey discovered in the Palace."[109] That narrative, however, was difficult to promote in the Arab world. This had been predicted by the British officials, who had expected "propaganda from Cairo and Baghdad to continue to accuse Her Majesty's Government of having deposed Sheikh Saqr" and anticipated that it "will also be alleged that public feeling in the Trucial States is incensed over the removal of this 'champion of liberation from British imperialism.'"[110] The Cairo and Baghdad "propaganda" that the British spoke of was supplemented with substantial analysis from revolutionary forces that viewed the coups as part of a broader regional plan for "cleaning up the imperial household."[111]

[107] Similar actions took place in other areas controlled by Britain outside of the Gulf, such as Buganda in 1953. See David E. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism*, revised 3rd ed. (London, 1997), chap. 13. They also took place in French-dominated territories, as demonstrated by incidents such as the 1953 deposition and exile of Morocco's Muhammad V. See Fouad Mustafa, *Muhammad al-Khamis wa-Kifah al-Maghrib al-ʿArabi* (Cairo, n.d. [ca. 1959–1961]). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that not every coup that takes place in or emanates from the colonies is a colonial coup. For instance, although the 1958 overthrow of the French Fourth Republic was launched from Algeria, it was essentially carried out by French army officers against the French state itself. A different sort of coup, the one that took place in Mexico City in 1808, has been referred to as a colonial coup by two leading scholars of the subject: Barbara H. Stein and Stanley J. Stein, *Crisis in an Atlantic Empire: Spain and New Spain, 1808–1810* (Baltimore, 2014), chap. 12. However, this coup is radically different from the ones discussed here, in that it was launched by local Spanish colonial military against their own viceroy. Both the 1958 French and the 1808 Mexican coups had implications for the colony in question, but they were subject to different dynamics than were coups entailing action by the metropole against one of its protected client rulers.

[108] TNA, FO 371/185529, P. Gent (Arabian Department) to S. J. Nuttall (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), September 2, 1966.

[109] TNA, FO 371/179904, Bahrain to Foreign Office, June 30, 1965.

[110] TNA, FO 371/179904, Bahrain to Foreign Office, July 2, 1965.

[111] Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi, "Muthakirat Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi: al-Sibaq 'ala al-Tartibat al-Siyassia bʿad Iʿlan al-Insihab al-Biritani," *al-Wasat*, November 5, 2008. This analysis continued to be prevalent for several years after the coup. For instance, utilizing the Maoist theory of contradictions, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Occupied Arab Gulf viewed the British policy of carrying out the coups and federating the emirates as an outcome of the "primary contradiction" between Anglo-sheikhly authorities and the Gulf masses, and "secondary contradictions" such as those taking place among the ranks of local

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One of the most effective weapons that Britain possessed in the battle against this publicity was its influence over international press agencies. For all these agencies' claims of professionalism and neutrality, this was an influence that was almost taken for granted in British policy circles. One of the men on the spot noted that a "reliable agency man carefully briefed in the lower Gulf is more likely than anyone to achieve suitable wide publicity for our version of facts. Can we get, say, Reuter's man down there fast?"[112] This initiated a correspondence that culminated in a recommendation that the UK embassy in Beirut contact Reuters to send an appropriate reporter.[113] In the face of Arab media and revolutionary proclamations, the suppression of facts and the forging of counter-narratives was ideologically important for maintaining the long-term legitimacy of local dynasties. Although Britain demonstrated in these instances and others that it was capable of temporarily suspending relative sheikhly autonomy, it was quick to restore the old order, and it was certainly aware that sheikhs could not function without the construction of a fictional world in which events, including coups, were totally reducible to their local efforts.[114]

Whereas most coups assert new identities for the regimes they bring about, colonial coups were designed to ensure structural continuity. Individual rulers were replaced, but ruling families remained; empires gradually transferred power to the new rulers, but they did so in a manner that ensured the stability of the overall economic and political system established by colonialism. In other words, colonial coups were designed to maintain objective conditions while replacing the subjective forces steering those conditions. In the language of critical sociological theory, they exemplified a system altering both "system elements" and "goal values" so as to maintain itself "at a new level of control."[115]

The coups against Sheikhs Saqr and Shakhbout paved the way for this to take place in the Trucial Coast of the Gulf. In 1970, these coups were complemented by the overthrow of Sultan Said bin Taimur in Oman.[116] By the time the Oman coup finally took place, the political infrastructure for withdrawal from the Gulf was established, and Britain had three new rulers it could depend on to ensure the future survival of the system and the containment of its foreign and local revolutionary enemies.

THE INITIAL SUCCESS of colonial coups, and the intensity of imperial attempts to legitimate them, does not mean that they were permanently irreversible. To have any hope of reversing a coup, a ruler needed one or more of the following: internal support from

sheikhly families. Al-Jabha al-Shaʿbiyya li-Tahrir Oman wa-l-Khalij al-ʿArabi al-Muhtall, *Al-Mukhattatat al-Imbiryaliyya wa-Ittihad al-Shuyukh fi Sahil Oman* (printed pamphlet, early 1973).

[112] TNA, FO 371/179904, Kuwait to Foreign Office, Telegram No. 295, July 1, 1965.

[113] TNA, FO 371/179904, Foreign Office to Bahrain, Telegram No. 852, July 1, 1965.

[114] This assertion of the "agency" of local rulers is echoed in some recent works in progress on the Gulf. A similar approach has long been adopted by conservative scholars in other parts of the world. For a critique of the concept of local agency as it is utilized in India (particularly by the Cambridge School authors), see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J., 2001). Dirks notes: "Curiously . . . Indian agency becomes a way of suggesting that colonial rule itself was an Indian project more than it was a European one" (307).

[115] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1975), 3.

[116] The Omani coup exhibited similar features to the previous ones and was organized by the very same group of British officials, viewed by them as the culmination of a process that had begun in Sharjah and continued in Abu Dhabi.

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within the family, backing from broader social forces, or strong transnational connections with states or political movements. In the case of Sheikh Shakhbout, he did not possess any of these prerequisites. He had alienated his relatives and the citizens of Abu Dhabi, and he had no allies in the Arab world or beyond.[117] Among revolutionaries, he was pointed to as an example of reactionary hostility to progress, and he was even satirized as "Sheikh La'bout" in the popular *Sawt al-Arab* radio series that was broadcast in the mid-1960s.[118] In Arab conservative circles, he was also the subject of ridicule.[119]

Sheikh Saqr had a very different reputation at home and abroad, enjoying internal and external support from various quarters, due not least to his developmental record and his proven pan-Arabist credentials. Following his deposition, he traveled to Cairo via Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq, arriving on June 30, 1965. The Egyptian press referred to him as "the legitimate ruler of Sharjah."[120] In a gesture of support, he was received by President Nasser on July 3, 1965, and was given a recently nationalized palace in the Duqi neighborhood of Cairo.[121] Although Nasser was opposed to monarchy in principle, he had a history of engagement with anticolonial hereditary rulers. For instance, when Muhammad V of Morocco was deposed by the French in a 1953 colonial coup, Nasser instructed his officials to support him, on the grounds that "we as revolutionaries should not necessarily oppose monarchies and monarchs that have not cooperated with the colonial powers, and that have taken honorable positions on the side of their people in confronting colonial authority."[122]

The same principle was applied in connection with Sheikh Saqr. With Egyptian backing, he spent the following year working hard on presenting his case and communicating the details of his deposition to the Arab League and the various Arab states. However, his diplomatic efforts did not yield satisfactory results.[123] While the diplomatic route to reclaiming his position was obviously blocked, there were still open horizons for revolutionary action. During his first year in Cairo, Sheikh Saqr had established the Oman Liberation Front, an organization that reflected his view that as a first step to-

[117] For further discussion of social discontent with Shakhbout, see Christopher M. Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (New York, 2008), 77–82.

[118] This show was scripted by the renowned Egyptian writer Mahmoud al-Saʿdani.

[119] Financial industry publications, such as Beirut's *Al-Masarif* (The Banks), had long mocked him, running anecdotal stories about how he refused to deposit money in banks, and suffered a hit after a substantial percentage of the cash notes that he supposedly kept in a storage room in his basement were chewed by rats. In line with the rest of the Arab press, *Al-Masarif* welcomed his deposition, stating: "Shakhbout insisted—with the conviction of one who was genuine with himself and true to the level of his thought—on keeping his country in the Middle Ages. He believed that his country should progress gradually, which meant that it should get to know education in a hundred years, and medicine in two hundred years." "Sheikh Shakhbout: al-Bank Afdal min Mustawdaʿ al-Fiʾran," *Al-Masarif* (Beirut), July 1963, 59.

[120] Al-Badr, *Rihla maʿ Qafilat al-Hayat, al-Juzʾan al-Thani wa-l-Thalith*, 326.

[121] "Istiqbal al-Shaykh Saqr al-Qassimi Amir al-Shariqa," July 3, 1965, President Gamal Abdel Nasser Photo Archive, http://nasser.org/Photos/PhotosResult.aspx?CS=5&x=3&lang=ar.

[122] Fathi al-Deeb, *Abdel Nasser wa-Thawrat al-Jazaʾir* (Cairo, 1990), 22.

[123] Sheikh Saqr attended the Third Arab Summit, held in Casablanca in September 1966, and attempted to mobilize support, but Gulf affairs were overshadowed at the time by the pressing crises confronting the Arab countries elsewhere, especially in Palestine. In the words of the Kuwaiti diplomat Badr al-Badr, "Sheikh Saqr met with several Arab presidents and kings to explain his country's cause, but in return he received only empty words and pleasantries"; *Rihla maʿ Qafilat al-Hayat, al-Juzʾan al-Thani wa-l-Thalith*, 331.

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ward broader Arab unity, all the states of the southern Gulf should merge into a "Greater Oman" that would be liberated from the British.[124]

Following the establishment of the Oman Liberation Front, Sheikh Saqr immersed himself in the effort to form a broad national coalition that would coordinate revolutionary efforts in the Gulf as a whole. He therefore hosted meetings in his palace that brought together representatives from the Dhufar Liberation Front (which was already leading an armed revolution in the south of Oman) and the National Liberation Front in Bahrain. With the support and blessing of the Egyptian authorities, these meetings culminated in the establishment of the Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Eastern Arabian Peninsula (FLOEAP) in 1966.[125]

In its political program, FLOEAP analyzed the fall of the Eastern Arabian Peninsula under British control and the system of economic exploitation that resulted from that process. Several aspects of this analysis were directly relevant to the Sharjah coup. For starters, there was a thorough critique of the treaty system by which the Gulf sheikhdoms were governed. British treaties were rejected as running counter "to international law and human justice."[126] Although it did not explicitly refer to the principle of *ex injuria jus non oritur*—the idea that right cannot arise from a wrong, which was utilized in many anticolonial arguments from the period—FLOEAP's analysis was effectively underlain by it. The rejection of colonial legality on this basis was especially significant given that Saqr was deposed under the guise of failing to uphold his treaty obligations.

FLOEAP's political program additionally turned colonial discourse on its head, accusing the British authorities of engaging in acts of piracy justified through the equation of right with might:

> This was the case when they carried out their known crime in Sharjah, through deposing the legitimate government there in June 1965 due to its opposition to their colonialist schemes and its cooperation with the Arab League. That constituted a flagrant challenge to the Arab nation.[127]

The FLOEAP political program also rejected the colonial practice of localizing events such as the coup in Sharjah. Instead of being seen as simply the outcome of an internal ruling family feud, the coup was situated in the broader context of the regional clash be-

[124] This was a position that was based more in genuine conviction than in mere instrumentalism, for Saqr had always considered himself an Omani who was connected to a broader Arab homeland, as can be evidenced in his early poems. In 1948, for instance, he wrote:

> Yemen, Najd, and Jerusalem my lands
> My homeland, fountainhead of the honorable, is Oman
> Salvation of the afflicted from all wretchedness

See Saqr al-Qassimi, "Watani Manbit al-Kiram" (1948), in al-Qassimi, *Diwan Saqr bin Sultan al-Qassimi* (Beirut, 1982), 278.

[125] Falah al-Mdairis, *al-Baʿthiyyun fi al-Khalij wa-l-Jazira al-ʿArabiyya* (Kuwait, 2002), 28–29.

[126] FLOEAP argued that such treaties are condemned by international bodies, especially when they are signed between "two countries that were unequal in knowledge and power," let alone in cases "in which they are imposed by an invading and occupying country." Al-Jabha al-Shaʿbiyya li-Tahrir Oman, *al-Jabha al-Wataniyya al-ʿArida wa-Daruratahа al-Tarikhiyya* (Beirut, n.d.), 46.

[127] Ibid. A considerable measure of historical role reversal could be detected here. Sheikh Saqr belonged to the Qawasim, who were subjugated by British forces in the nineteenth century under the guise of "suppressing piracy." At the height of the anticolonial age, the Qassimi sheikh and his revolutionary partners were now accusing the empire itself of piracy, albeit by seizing states instead of ships.

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tween the forces of anticolonial liberation and colonial control.[128] FLOEAP further argued that "the long history of struggle" in the Gulf proved that "the fragmentation and isolation of patriotic movements within their respective areas" and "the lack of a comprehensive plan for struggle" stood as obstacles "in the face of achieving the liberationist goals of our masses."[129] This view was consistent with the general Nasserist approach to liberation movements during this period, which emphasized the need for creating national fronts that would bring under their respective wings as many active revolutionary forces on the ground as possible.[130]

The success of these fronts depended on securing Egyptian military, logistical, and political support. In the case of FLOEAP, this support did not materialize because of the 1967 War. Following its defeat, Egypt ceased its efforts to revolutionize the Gulf and ended its activities in the region.[131] However, this did not end Saqr's attempts to reverse the coup. On January 24, 1972, with the support of local Arab nationalists such as Sultan al-Oweis, Qassimi ruling family members, and Bedouin forces, he tried to regain his throne. At least in part, he was spurred by the disaffection over Sheikh Khalid's handling of Iran's seizure of the Tunb Islands and his acquiescence to a Memorandum of Understanding, signed on November 30, 1971, allowing Iran to station troops on the island of Abu Musa.[132] He smuggled himself into Sharjah and led a contingent of twenty-five men into the Emiri Palace. During the course of the invasion, the cousin whom the British had put in his place was killed. Nevertheless, Saqr's counter-coup failed due to the intervention of forces sent by the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.[133]

This failure illustrates the fact that in the unfavorable atmosphere of the early 1970s, Sheikh Saqr did not receive enough local or transnational backing to reverse his removal. In the 1950s, in contrast, the coups against Sultan Muhammad V of Morocco and Kabaka Mutesa II of Buganda were successfully reversed. These rulers were able to attract such strong international and national mobilization that metropolitan authorities were eventually forced to restore them.[134] In many ways, this was the outcome of how

[128] Given that colonialism was an interconnected global system, Sheikh Saqr and his allies considered that it could be confronted only by a systematic struggle for liberation that would harness pan-Arab, as opposed to just local, energies. This was the logic behind their establishment of FLOEAP. Ibid., 48.

[129] Ibid.

[130] This was something that the Egyptian authorities had supported in Dhufar, playing a decisive role in the creation of the Dhufar Liberation Front in 1964. It was also a strategy that they were pushing for in South Yemen, through the ultimately unsuccessful attempt in 1966 to force a merger between the National Liberation Front and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen.

[131] An important analysis of the effects of Egyptian withdrawal from the Gulf arena on revolutionary forces in the region, including FLOEAP, was provided by the Bahraini revolutionary leader Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi in 1978. See Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi, "Masirat al-Wihda wa-l-Tadamun bayna al-Wataniyyin wa-l-Dimuqratiyyin fi al-Jazira wa-l-Khalij," in al-Nuaimi, *al-Aʿmal al-Kamila li-l-Munadil Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi: Watan fi al-Kalam, al-Juzʾ al-Thani, al-Qism al-Thalith* (Bahrain, 2016), 318–320.

[132] Al-Nuaimi, "Muthakirat Abdel Rahman al-Nuaimi."

[133] Ali Hashem, *Al-Khalij al-ʿArabi: Rihlat ʿUmr* (London, 1991), 119.

[134] Interestingly, both rulers were removed in 1953 and restored in 1955. The French colonial coup strengthened Muhammad V, who was hailed following his exile as a hero across the Arab world and beyond. This is reflected in celebratory accounts of the ruler that were published in Arab anticolonial capitals. See, for instance, Mustafa, *Muhammad al-Khamis wa-Kifah al-Maghrib al-ʿArabi*. France was eventually forced to reverse the coup, due to the strength of the local, Arab, and international anticolonial mobilization that it generated as well as the lack of support from its most powerful ally, the United States. Egya N. Sangmuah, "Sultan Mohammed ben Youssef's American Strategy and the Diplomacy of North African Liberation, 1943–61," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 1 (1992): 129–148. In the case of Buganda, extensive popular opposition as well as the intervention of the Anglican Church and a variety of

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these coups were framed and understood globally and locally. The cause of Muhammad V, in particular, was intimately tied to a broader struggle between colonialism and anticolonialism, and came to symbolize this struggle during a crucial phase in the history of the Arab *maghreb*. This meant that it had immense generative capacity when it came to mobilizing social movements and external states opposed to colonialism.[135]

In contrast, while Saqr was initially able to tie his deposition to broader Arab struggles, by 1972 this argument was no longer sustainable. His return to Sharjah took place after the formal British withdrawal. On the local level, this meant that it was difficult for him to connect his cause to a broader national demand such as independence, and his fate was therefore subject to the balance of forces existing on the ground. He retained the support of some merchants, and some "Bedouin tribes were still loyal to him as the legitimate ruler."[136] Yet his structural position was far weaker than at the moment of his deposition in 1965, when Nasser's revolutionary tide was still high and Sharjah was still a British protected state. Not only was Saqr's deposition rendered permanent in 1972, but he was tried and imprisoned until 1979. Upon his release, he went into exile in Cairo and never returned to live in his emirate again.[137]

One of the difficulties in studying colonial coups is that they are not officially recognized for what they really were. While some coups legitimate themselves by means of loudly announcing their main actors, foundational moments, and political programs, colonial coups tend to be accompanied by understatement; not only are the names of the genuine perpetrators suppressed, but the focus is on the ascension of the new ruler rather than the deposition of the previous one. Rupture with the past is not presented in ideological terms, and the discussion is centered on the personal virtues of the new ruler and the vices of the old.[138] In the case of the Gulf, this highly personalized discourse entrenches the absence of a political culture of change. It perpetuates the notion of an eternal, unbroken monarchical present, while allowing ordinary citizens to absorb the highly politicized yet mysterious events that influence their lives without transgressing the parameters of permissible thought set out by the new order.

The account presented here is intended to encourage a reorientation in perspective and the initiation of a broader conversation on the connection between coups, imperial policy, and local governance. Scholars have recently begun to question the dominant frameworks pertaining to the initial birth of colonial systems of "indirect rule."[139] The

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other establishment bodies played an important role in restoring the ruler in 1955. See Kevin Ward, "The Church of Uganda and the Exile of Kabaka Muteesa II, 1953–55," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, fasc. 4 (1998): 441–449.

[135] By virtue of its much larger population and size, Morocco occupied far more cognitive space than Sharjah in the minds of state and non-state actors, and it had immeasurably larger human resources for fighting an anticolonial battle against a colonial coup. Moreover, Muhammad V's efforts to return benefited from the propulsive force of global and regional anticolonialism.

[136] Hashem, *Al-Khalij al-ʿArabi*, 130.

[137] Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition* (London, 1982), 485 n.

[138] In the case of the United Arab Emirates, more recent official versions erase coups from the record entirely. For a representative sample, see *Al-Kitab al-Sanawi 2008: Lamahat min al-Tarikh al-Qadim* (Abu Dhabi, 2008), 34.

[139] Lewis, *Divided Rule*.

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wave of colonial coups discussed here invites us, likewise, to complicate the story of decolonization. These colonial coups were explicitly designed to limit the threat of anticolonialism, either by removing ruling elites committed to it (as was the case in Sharjah) or by preemptively placating social constituencies that could potentially mobilize toward political and economic independence in the absence of economic modernization (as seen in Abu Dhabi).

Indeed, colonial coups are best understood as acts of containment. At the same time that colonial administrators were seeking to protect geographic space by reimagining its boundaries, they were also defending political space by safeguarding the alignment between local rulers and imperial policy.[140] Significantly, this sort of containment reflected a politics of predetermination that was oriented toward the future as well as the present; replacing "unsuitable" figures preordained policy in the post-withdrawal period. This did more than influence the course of events in territories that were subjected to colonial coups, for the removal of rulers in such locales as Sharjah and Abu Dhabi deterred their neighbors from straying off the overall path set firmly by Britain. Ironically, the semblance of decolonization in the present resulted in the occupation of the future, insulating the sphere of government from unwanted independent ideas and alignments for decades to come. In this way, colonial coups compensated for the shrinking phalanx of the British Empire.

The implications of this can be better highlighted through a brief comparison with India, the political unit with which the Gulf had been most closely connected prior to 1947. There, a state structure developed during the struggle for independence that paralleled and, by 1950, completely absorbed the 565 princes dotted across the subcontinent. In contrast, the Gulf states that were connected to the Raj were not replaced by a powerful unitary republic driven by modern nationalism.[141] The British maintained the sheikhdoms by federating the smallest, consolidating the largest, and ensuring that all were beginning to construct state structures that could co-opt the local population and incorporate it into a newly emerging oil economy.

The main feature of this system was the concentration of power at the very top of the political pyramid and the suppression of popular sovereignty. This meant that objec-

[140] Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, there was an intense Arab nationalist awareness of the process of geographic and political alteration taking place. Egyptian policymakers were especially attuned to the situation in Aden and the Protectorates, especially after Britain devised federal proposals that culminated in the establishment of the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South in 1959. A good sense of Egyptian views on the subject can be gained from a book authored by General Muhammad Kamal Abdel Hamid, *Al-Istiʿmar al-Baritani fi Janub al-Jazira al-ʿArabiyya* (Cairo, n.d. [ca. 1960]). A senior officer and expert on Yemeni affairs, he analyzed the objectives of the federation in terms of British intentions to stem the anticolonial tide. He considered that Britain was hoping to prevent the spread of Arab nationalism to the Indian Ocean by means of creating federations resistant to it there: "Britain seeks to imprison Arab nationalism in a locked box of sand, and to prevent it from connecting with East Africa, India, and East Asia, i.e., the Afro-Asian bloc." For Abdel Hamid, it was important to "approach the Arab cause in the south and east of the Arabian Peninsula as a single and indivisible subject. For the enemy is the same, and the arena is the same, and the victim targeted by colonialism is the same" (112, 113). In Arab revolutionary circles, such views of the federation in South Arabia later influenced their negative assessments of the United Arab Emirates project in the Trucial States of the Southern Gulf.

[141] The specific factors behind the integration of the Princely States into the Indian Union have been debated in Indian history. On the one hand, scholars such as V. P. Menon subscribed to the idea that the process of decolonization and higher-level negotiations determined the fate of these states. On the other, authors such as P. Sundarraya and M. A. Rasul emphasized the role of popular struggles within these states. See Waltraud Ernst and Biswamoy Pati, "People, Princes and Colonialism," in Ernst and Pati, eds., *India's Princely States: People, Princes and Colonialism* (London, 2007), 1–14, here 2.

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tive factors, such as absorption into the world economy or dependence on long-term British (and later Anglo-American) military protection, were not enough to ensure the continued operation of the new system in accordance with imperial interests; the character, beliefs, dispositions, and networks of local sheikhs also mattered. While sheikhly governance was upheld at all costs, the rulers were replaced when necessary. Here the colonial words of Winston Churchill ring especially true. During the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, Churchill was asked by a Gulf sheikh about a matter of great local importance. In response, he instructed the interpreter: "Tell him that we try never to desert our friends." He paused and then added: "unless we have to."[142]

The desertion of friends, the overthrow of foes, and the installment of new clients and allies were, indeed, important features of the high age of anticolonialism. The first images that come to mind from that age are of armed liberation struggles and counterinsurgencies. Yet in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, coups embodied another form of global revolutionary and counterrevolutionary politics. After the decline of gunboat diplomacy and direct military occupation, and before the advent of post–Cold War doctrines of regime change and the new military humanism, coups were an expedient way of pursuing colonial and anticolonial agendas alike.

[142] The ruler was Sheikh Salman of Bahrain, who was asking for British support in asserting Bahrain's claim to the island of Zubbara. Weir, memoirs, 35.

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